

**STELLA MARIS COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS) CHENNAI – 86**  
(For candidates admitted from the academic year 2023 – 2024 and thereafter)

**B. A. DEGREE EXAMINATION, APRIL 2026**  
**ENGLISH AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS**  
**FOURTH SEMESTER**

**COURSE : MAJOR CORE**

**COURSE TITLE : CONTEMPORARY WORLD LITERATURE**

**COURSE CODE : 23CE/MC/CW45**

**TIME : 3 HOURS**

**MAX. MARKS: 100**

Q.No.	SECTION A	CO	KL
	<b>Answer any four questions in about 100 words each. (4 x 5 = 20)</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
1.	Why does Edward Kamau Brathwaite use the word “limbo” repeatedly in his poem?		
2.	What is the significance of the Land of Almost-Awake in Fredrik Backman’s <i>My Grandmother Asked Me to Tell You She’s Sorry</i> ?		
3.	Which conventions of the fairy-tale tradition does Emily Carroll rework in <i>Through the Woods</i> ?		
4.	How does Sejal Shah show both admiration for and alienation from the Betsy-Tacy series?		
5.	What is the central idea behind Szyborska’s reimagining of Lot’s wife?		
Q.No.	SECTION B	CO	KL
	<b>Answer any two questions in about 200 words each. (2 x 10 = 20)</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
6.	What is Barghouti representing through the child in “A Night Unlike Others”?		
7.	How does Neon Yang explore themes of power, identity and resistance in <i>The Black Tides of Heaven</i> ?		
8.	What aspect of Bob Dylan’s song did you find most impactful? Discuss with reference to the lyrics.		
Q.No.	SECTION C	CO	KL
	<b>Answer any one question in about 300 words. (1 x 20 = 20)</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
9.	Analyse how differences in genre and authorial position shape the ways Solli Raphael and Wangari Maathai address their audiences in calling for environmental action.		
10.	How do Márquez and Murakami use extraordinary events to reveal aspects of human nature in “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings” and “The Second Bakery Attack”?		
Q.No.	SECTION D	CO	KL
	<b>Answer any one question in about 300 words. (1 x 20 = 20)</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>
11.	Discuss how Ayad Akhtar uses racial and religious tensions to build dramatic conflict in <i>Disgraced</i> .		
12.	Examine how the prescribed texts on your syllabus reflect the complexities of the present-day world. Discuss by referring to a minimum of three texts.		

	SECTION E	CO	KL
	<b>Choose any one of the following extracts and answer the questions that follow.</b> <b>(1 x 20 = 20)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5, 6</b>
13.	<p>From “<b>Some Notes on Mediated Time</b>” <i>Dead and Alive: Essays (2025)</i> By <b>Zadie Smith</b></p> <p>Of course, I am in no way immune to algorithms and the things they do to the time of my life – but I’m on a pretty low dose, comparatively speaking. I like to look at Moo Deng as much as the next person, but I can only do that at my desk, on my laptop. Moo Deng is not in my pocket. Why not keep your computer on your desk instead of in your pocket? Now, <i>there’s</i> an antique question. Or an example of absurd privilege. Or just an annoying humble brag. We have reached the point of such complete psychological saturation and practical domination that to even mention now what would have been, really not very long ago, an entirely reasonable proposition (if not for adults, then at least for <i>eleven-year-old children</i>) is now considered a bizarre and outdated request, unnatural – even an infringement on a child’s human rights. In less than twenty years, we have remodelled every aspect of our lives around the iPhone, as if it were only a tool and not also an ideology. Maybe you only see the enormity of the change when you’re not a part of it. Sometimes I just feel this surreal...loneliness. Any corner of life could provide an example, but that train carriage mentioned above is as good as any. It’s the double theft that gets me. The way it makes the public private, and the private public. The first theft is of the commons itself. By which I mean that shared, public space that every human <i>until very recently</i> experienced as a natural right, <i>especially</i> children. Of course, there were always a few adults in their own world on the train, reading the news or listening to music or deep in a novel – I was one of them! – but children could always be counted on to be present. They looked up and around and at you, got bored, threw tantrums, made outrageous comments, made the adults around them sigh or groan or laugh. Now they are silent. For all of human history, children have been an essential, noisy part of the commons, if not its lifeblood. They are our shared wealth, whether we give birth to them or not. But it’s not the kind of wealth that you can monetize or that belongs to any one person. Adults and children walking and/or sitting in a public space, every single one of them nominally in the same reality at the same moment? I don’t think there’s a place left on earth where that is occurring. And I miss it! That version of the common life – <i>I miss it.</i></p> <p>...</p> <p>I know that the forces of capital have always despised the commons, precisely <i>because</i> you can’t monetize it, and that their signature move has always been to denigrate whatever is shared and free (in this case, reality itself, time itself, which was designated as <i>impossibly, unliveably</i> boring, around 2008). In its place they offer instead something costly, private, individuated. The novelty this time is that we pay the cost existentially. We are the product. Every kid on the train is in their private, monetized dream, giving up their human attention to the algorithm, which at some point down the line will be turned for somebody else’s profit. Most moving to me are the kids who have internalized the pointless lectures of Luddite parents like me and are trying to at least keep the phone in their pocket for ten minutes or more. The struggle is visible. And every few moments, there it is, out again, and in their hand, its siren calls necessarily answered, because actually the entire world is now structured in a way that makes it basically impossible not to check every few moments, even if you were tied, like Odysseus, to the prow of a ship. Friendship admin,</p>		

	<p>parents' messages, school admin, WhatsApp messages, dropped pins, news alerts, snap maps, Insta stories – what an extraordinary amount of psychic labour we have given our children! Despite the fact that we can barely handle it ourselves. I'd guess that about once a minute in the big wide Western world some very online adult person writes a <i>cri di coeur</i> on their platform about how they can't hack it any more, and are taking a break for the sake of their mental health, which they explain eloquently and at length upon whatever platform they are on. But you are thirty-two – or however old you are. These kids are <i>eleven</i>.</p> <p>And then there's the second theft: the private made public. The beautiful people of <i>Baywatch</i> or <i>The Fresh Prince of Bel Air</i> did not follow me into my bedroom and taunt me with my inadequacy till three a.m., nor ask me to feed my inadequacies back to them so they could return them to me the next morning in a more concentrated, precise and vicious form. We have decimated what was left of our kids' privacy: they are entirely porous to the world, even in the seclusion of their rooms. There's no backstage to life any more, not for them. And, at the exact same time, we collapsed the public, shared world. (And set it on fire, but that's a different essay.)</p>		
	<p>a. Does Zadie Smith's depiction of being constantly connected on social media reflect a defining feature of contemporary life? Evaluate with reference to the extract. (10 marks)</p>	5	5
	<p>b. Reimagine the essay as the opening chapter of a dystopian novel. What social structures, technologies and forms of resistance would you develop? (10 marks)</p>	5	6
14.	<p>From <i>Untold Night and Day</i> (2020) By <b>Bae Suah</b> (translated from the Korean by Deborah Smith)</p> <p>They sat on a bench at the foot of the statue in the square and shared out cola and ice between two paper cups whose wax coating had grown tacky in the heat. The cola became lukewarm as the ice rapidly melted. They stayed there even after the sun had fully set, because Wolfi had taken his laptop out of his backpack and begun to write. There was rubbish scattered around the bench: packaging from a Burger King meal, a dirty quilt, an empty cola bottle, cigarette stubs. Someone had clearly been sleeping there, having ended up homeless for some unknown reason. Ayami and Wolfi also had a Burger King meal. The square was full of people hurrying to catch a train, and those who had just come off a train, and/or were heading for the subway. A grand piano had been placed in front of the station colonnade. A shabbily dressed middle-aged man sat down at the piano and began to play. The intensity of his movements attracted the notice of passers-by. Those who had stopped to watch him were bumped into by those still walking, but it was the watchers, not the walkers, who eventually gave up and pressed on, while the walkers became watchers in turn. In front of the piano was an open briefcase containing notes and coins tossed in by appreciative listeners. Thick droplets of sweat collected on the pianist's jaw and plopped down onto the keyboard. A bird with a curved beak, grey back and yellow webbed feet alighted on the piano's wing-shaped lid. It flew off again after depositing some pale grey shit.</p> <p>Wolfi chewed his hamburger hungrily.</p> <p>'Back home I eat sushi from a paper lunch box,' he grumbled. 'Now I've come all the way to the Far East and end up with a Burger King. But I'll take it over hot rice.'</p> <p>Pinching French fries between her fingers, Ayami thought Wolfi's voice made it sound as if he were complaining, even when he was just making conversation.</p> <p>'Is it Schubert?' Wolfi muttered. 'It's too far away to hear properly. And the traffic's too loud.'</p>		

	<p>‘It’s jazz,’ Ayami said. ‘The melody’s familiar, but the title isn’t coming to me ... and you’re right it’s too noisy to make it out properly. The noise of the traffic is like the sound when a field of barley is set on fire.’</p> <p>‘Huh? The sound of a barley field on fire? I’ve never heard that expression. I don’t know what a barley field on fire sounds like. Were you born in the countryside?’</p> <p>‘Probably not. But I’m not sure.’</p> <p>‘What kind of answer is that?’</p> <p>‘I don’t really remember. I left home when I was young.’</p> <p>‘But you’d still know, from your parents.’</p> <p>‘I was adopted.’</p> <p>‘Ah, I see.’</p> <p>Just then, Ayami’s phone rang. She cupped the receiver with her hand while she took the call, to block out the noise from their surroundings.</p> <p>‘Of course I’ll listen to you,’ Ayami said into the receiver. ‘And you listen to me, too, please. Isn’t that why you called?’ She paused to listen, then spoke again. ‘Yes, we’ll discover an unknown place ... like we always do. But not right now. Right now Yeoni is absent. Later, when she returns, she will become your cave. The third cave that exists simultaneously ...’</p> <p>‘Were you talking to Yeoni just then?’ Wolfi asked as soon as Ayami hung up. ‘I didn’t mean to eavesdrop, but I thought I heard the name “Yeoni”. Though of course I might have misheard.’</p> <p>‘That’s right, you misheard. “Yeoni” is a very common phoneme in Korean.’</p> <p>‘Ah, is that so?’ Wolfi nodded, and they went back to eating in silence.</p> <p>After a while Ayami’s phone rang again.</p> <p>‘Of course I’ll listen to you. And you listen to me, too, please. Isn’t that why you called? ... Yes, we’ll discover an unknown place ... like we always do. But not right now. Right now Yeoni is absent. Later, when she returns, she will become your cave. The third cave that exists simultaneously ...’</p> <p>‘I’m awfully sorry, but ...’ Wolfi began again as soon as Ayami got off the phone, unable to suppress his curiosity. ‘If you weren’t talking to Yeoni, I’d be very grateful if you’d say, just briefly, what you were talking about. Because, though yours is a strange, foreign language I’ve never heard before, still I could tell that the two conversations were very similar. And then, the tone of your voice as you were speaking ... it was very, well, particular. A particular voice talking about a particular moment in life, that was it. It makes me want to know what could be said in such a voice. All of a sudden, I’m curious about the acoustics of Korean. It sounded exceptionally secretive, distinct from the kind of standardised babble that fills the streets of the world’s other big cities. Though I have no way of knowing whether that impression was produced by your voice, or because it was an especially private conversation. Of course, if it was private then naturally you don’t have to tell me what it was. I’m asking purely out of musicological curiosity.’</p> <p>‘It’s not private. I was recording a message for my answerphone. I was worried the first one might have got deleted by mistake, so I recorded it again to be sure.’</p> <p>‘Ah, I see.’ Wolfi nodded. ‘Strangely, when I heard you speak just then, the thought passed through my mind that “Yeoni” might be a Korean word for “secret”.’</p> <p>‘It’s just a phoneme, like I said. It doesn’t mean anything in itself.’</p>		
	<p>a. Evaluate how this extract presents contemporary urban society through its setting and character interactions. (10 marks)</p>	5	5
	<p>b. Is the apparent lack of dramatic action in this passage a weakness or a deliberate choice of the author? Justify your answer. (10 marks)</p>	5	6